



Benchmarking Alumni Relations in Community Colleges: *Findings from a 2015 CASE Survey*

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FOREWORD BY PAUL HEATON

With more than 12 million students enrolled in U.S. community colleges each year, the potential number of “alumni” is staggering.

Community colleges, though, have been slow to embrace this massive group of potential volunteers, advocates and supporters—starting with the term “alumni” itself. As this new CASE survey reveals, the definition of “alumni” varies greatly within this large sector of higher education.

But there are encouraging signs, this new research shows.

Not only have more community colleges spent more time on alumni relations in the last three years, but total giving from alumni, as well as the number of alumni donors, has increased.

Those working in community college advancement, including alumni relations, recognize the value and potential of this long-neglected constituency. The challenge remains convincing foundation boards, governing boards and college leadership of the value in investing in alumni relations.

Among the most compelling reasons for a community college to embrace its former students: an average of 71 percent of a community college’s former students live within the college’s or district’s service area. Given the shifting funding climate for community colleges, that is a statistic that these institutions literally cannot afford to ignore.

Since alumni relations is all about building and sustaining relationships, the return on investment, being realistic, can be slow. However, these new data clearly validate standard best practices, from data management and staffing, to communications and engagement.

Today we celebrate the vision, decades ago, of the founders of community colleges that resulted in educational institutions that are the envy of most communities. It is time for a new group of visionaries to seize today’s opportunity and usher in a new era of community college alumni relations. A few decades from now, today’s visionaries—the new community college alumni relations pioneers—will be equally appreciated.

The data from this survey provide an important look not only at where we are in community college alumni relations but also at just how much room there is to grow.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building on the inaugural survey conducted three years prior, the 2015 CASE Community College Alumni Relations survey collected additional insightful data on staffing, structure, communications, engagement and fundraising. The latest snapshot from community colleges across the United States shows that alumni relations has made some progress. There is more of an organizational commitment to the discipline than in the past, and the increased focus has set the stage for some positive outcomes in engagement with former students. Although most institutions have small or nascent programs, clearly some have turned the corner and begun to integrate alumni relations into the fabric of their institutions.

Many of the survey results demonstrate that community college staff have embraced alumni relations, even if the change has been slow at many institutions. Advancement professionals are spending more time on alumni relations than they did three years ago, despite competition with dozens of other assignments in the typical staffer's day. Counts for staff handling alumni relations are on the rise: 61 percent of responding institutions had some full-time alumni relations staff in 2015, compared to 54 percent in 2012. The term "alumni relations" is also appearing in official staff titles more frequently than it ever did before.

The encouraging data on staffing trends were complemented by an ongoing financial dedication to alumni relations. A majority of institutions continued to have a dedicated annual operating budget for alumni relations. The average alumni relations budget amount was nearly \$27,000 in 2015, with 66 percent of institutions surpassing the \$10,000 mark. The college itself was most likely to be the source of funds for the budget, with annual unrestricted gifts from the foundation serving as the other important source. On the other hand, alumni association/organization dues seldom were a source of funding. Community colleges have been moving away from the practice of charging for association membership: 76 percent did not charge dues in 2012, rising to 81 percent in 2015.

Alumni relations budgets funded a wide array of activities at nearly every institution surveyed. Most of these activities have been firmly entrenched at community colleges for some time.

The largest expense often was printing, which accounted for 17 percent of the average alumni relations budget, followed closely by special events at 16 percent. Although many institutions have started to pay for technology-based amenities such as data services (five percent) and web/social media (four percent), the survey data confirm that successful engagement with alumni still requires "tried and true" methods that feature social events and personal touches.

With traditional engagement techniques holding steady, community college staff have started to embrace emerging technologies for a variety of applications. Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter each registered gains in frequency for communication with alumni. Facebook and Twitter also had more usage as solicitation tools. These social media utilities were the only communication and solicitation tools that displayed any noticeable growth in the past three years. There was little movement in either direction for tactics involving newsletters, magazines, direct mail or events, but they remain important catalysts for alumni activity.

The blended approach has contributed to progress with tracking, connecting and soliciting alumni. Community colleges identified greater raw numbers of alumni than they did three years ago. Nearly half of the average alumni base can be matched with a valid mailing address, and 19 percent have a valid email address, up from 12 percent in 2012. The statistics on alumni giving are trending positively too. The percentage of the alumni base who were donors increased from 0.5 percent to 0.9 percent, and the alumni share of total giving rose from 6.5 percent to 9.1 percent. Clearly, all of these areas have room for improvement, but the trends are encouraging.

The outcome metrics gravitated toward positive results, and the survey respondents' assessments of progress also pointed to some meaningful change. Roughly half of the participating advancement professionals observed increases in overall engagement by alumni, with only seven percent admitting a decrease. Nearly all of the respondents noted that staff members dedicated at least the same amount of their time to alumni relations, if not more. The leadership at many community colleges has made the commitment to alumni relations, so the staff members have executed and started to deliver promising returns.

The 2015 survey results demonstrate that alumni relations has become more established at community colleges compared to a few years ago. The advancement professionals who embraced the discipline have helped move the needle in the right direction. Many positive outcomes that emerged in the survey data dovetailed with other metrics indicative of the staff time and other resources allocated to alumni relations. In most cases, community colleges need to put the effort into alumni relations to realize gains in engagement and philanthropy. The growing understanding of community college alumni relations programs helps makes the discovery of these links among structure, activity and outcomes possible.

INTRODUCTION

Survey Background

CASE founded the Center for Community College Advancement in 2011 to provide training and resources to help community colleges build and sustain effective fundraising, alumni relations, and communications and marketing programs. A goal for the center is to collect data on best practices at community colleges. This white paper summarizes the results of an ongoing survey on alumni relations programs at community colleges across the United States. The purpose of the survey was to help community college staff benchmark their experiences and programs in alumni relations with their peers.

For more information about the CASE Center for Community College Advancement, visit www.case.org/communitycolleges.

Survey Methodology

The CASE research office fielded the Community College Alumni Relations survey in March 2015. All U.S. institutions that offer associate degrees were eligible to participate. A total of 139 usable responses were collected for a response rate of 13.3 percent. Responding institutions represented a broad range of demographic profiles reflecting enrollment size, geographic area and alumni base.

Statistics in the Report: How to Interpret

Percentages are rounded to the nearest percentage for most results. Because of rounding, not all percentages may add to 100. In some cases, totals add to more than 100 percent due to respondents' ability to select more than one response to a question.

Commonly used statistics in this report include the following:

Mean (or Simple Mean or Average). The mean is calculated by summing all responses to a question and dividing by the number of respondents to that question. Unless there are clear outliers that need to be excluded from the calculation (i.e., a few responses that are far outside the expected range of values for a given question), the mean includes each value reported. A mean computation can be affected by extremely high or low values.

Median. When all values for a given question are rank-ordered from lowest to highest (or the reverse), the value in the middle position is the median. Half the values are above this point and half are below. If there is an even number of values, the median is derived by taking the values just below and just above the midpoint and averaging the two.

The median is sometimes preferred over the mean as a more representative measure because median values are not added and then divided by the number of respondents (as the mean is) but rather are chosen from the position of the value at the midpoint of the values. Thus, the median is less vulnerable to being skewed by very high or very low individual values. However, when both the mean and the median measures are provided, readers can get a sense of the range of responses to a question if there is a significant difference between the two measures.

Detailed Results by Respondent Segments

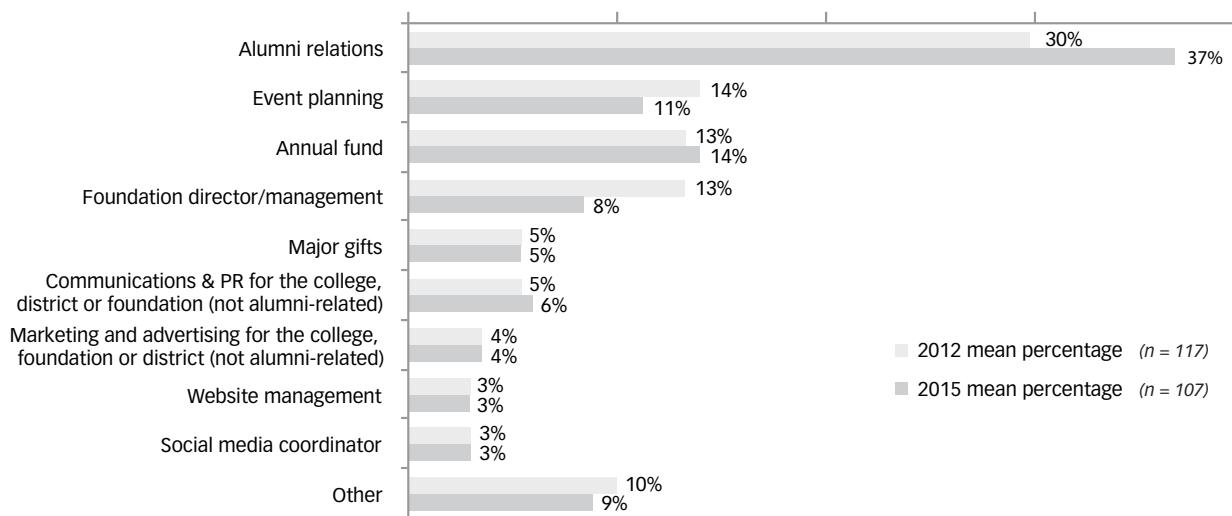
Several analyses were performed to segment the results based on important institutional demographic characteristics, such as enrollment size and single college/district operating status. Although the breakouts provided more detail on alumni relations activities and outcomes among sub-groups of respondents, this white paper does not have adequate space to present a comprehensive list of the corresponding tables. For more information about the segmented results, please contact the CASE Research staff by sending an email to *research@case.org*.

THE ALUMNI RELATIONS OFFICE

Many community colleges have continued to embrace the importance of alumni relations through dedicated staff resources. Although not every institution has the luxury of creating full-time positions for alumni relations, the survey data did reveal an increase in staff time around the discipline. In 2015, the senior-most staff member with responsibility for alumni relations spent an average of 37 percent of his or her time on alumni relations (figure 1). The average was 30 percent three years ago.

Figure 1

Primary responsibilities of the chief alumni relations staff member

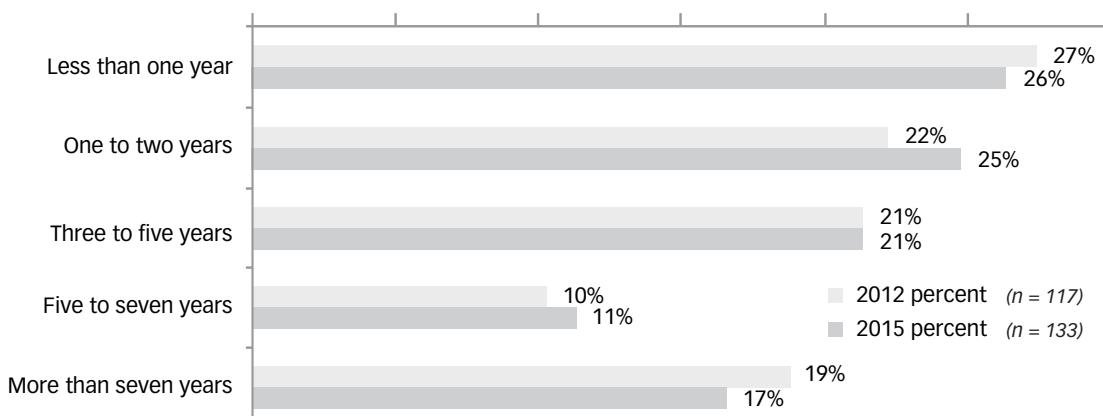


Other activities that remained important for the head of alumni relations included event planning (11 percent) and the annual fund (14 percent). Technological responsibilities such as the website and social media continued to be low priorities (three percent each).

Despite the increased attention to alumni relations in community colleges, most staff charged with managing the discipline were newcomers to the role. More than half of the responding institutions had a senior-most alumni relations officer with no more than two years of experience in that position (figure 2). Only 17 percent of the institutions surveyed had a chief alumni relations officer with a tenure of more than seven years in that role. These percentages are very similar to those from 2012, indicating high turnover in alumni relations leadership.

Figure 2

Tenure of chief alumni relations staff member in current role



Other survey results suggest that community colleges are making incremental personnel allocations to alumni relations. In 2015, the percentage of institutions with full-time staff dedicated to the discipline was 61 percent, compared to 54 percent in 2012 (table 1). The vast majority of those institutions had only one full-time alumni relations staffer; seven percent had two full-time positions.

Table 1

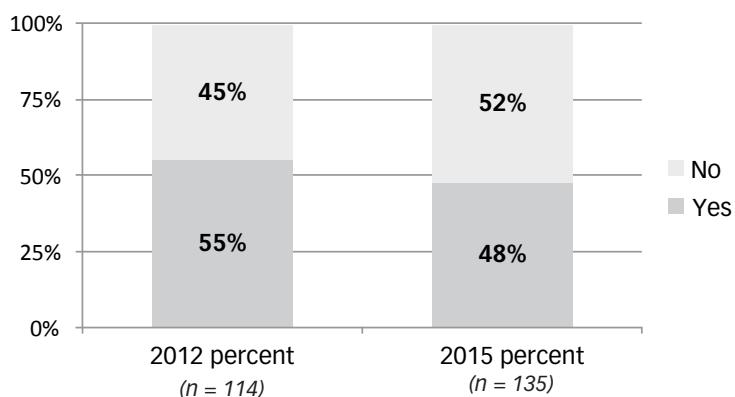
Number of full-time and part-time staff members at community colleges that are dedicated to alumni relations

	2012		2015	
Number of AR staff	Full-time employees	Part-time employees	Full-time employees	Part-time employees
Median	1.0	0.0	1.0	0.0
Mean	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.4
Minimum	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Maximum	4.0	5.0	2.0	4.0
% of institutions reporting any staff	54%	35%	61%	30%
	(n = 117)		(n = 135)	
	2012		2015	
Number of AR staff	Full-time employees	Part-time employees	Full-time employees	Part-time employees
None	46%	65%	39%	70%
One or less	44%	30%	55%	25%
More than one	10%	5%	7%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(n = 117)		(n = 135)	

Part-time positions for alumni relations were less prevalent than full-time positions, with only 30 percent of responding institutions having any part-time staff. The average number of part-time alumni relations staff members was 0.4 in 2015, which was similar to the average of 0.5 in 2012.

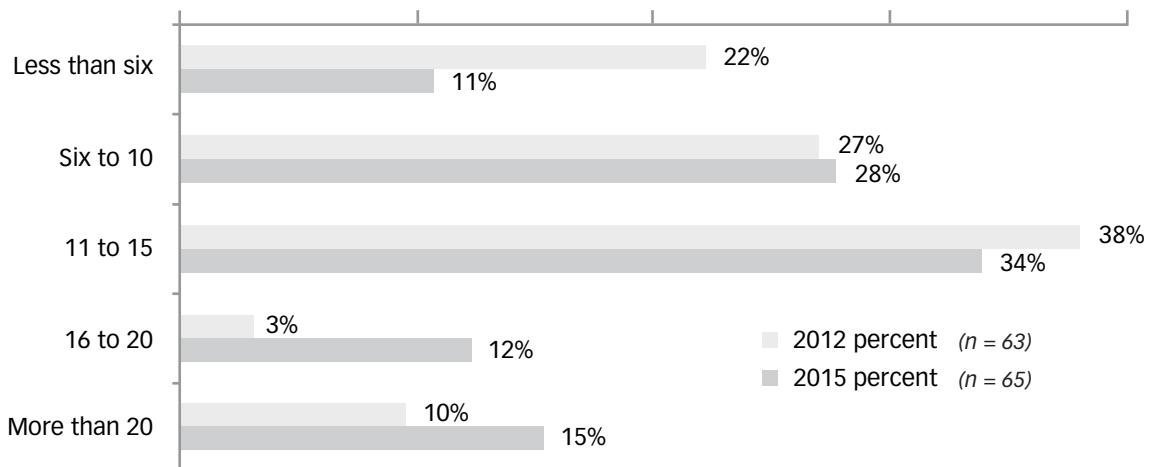
Community colleges were again evenly divided in the decision to have an alumni board or council. Roughly half of responding institutions have an alumni board or council, and the other half does not (figure 3).

Figure 3
Presence of an alumni board/council



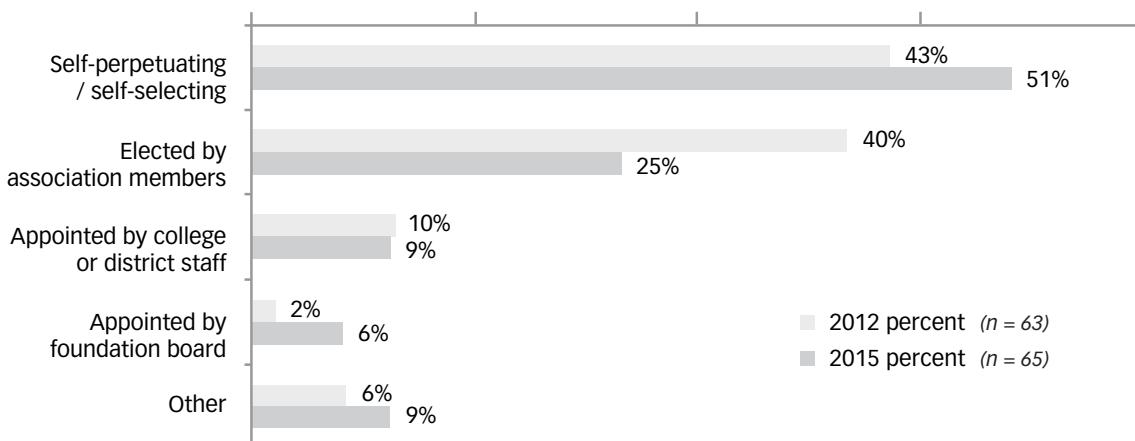
The most popular composition of the alumni board was 11 to 15 members (34 percent of responding institutions). See figure 4. An additional 28 percent of community colleges had alumni boards with six to 10 members.

Figure 4
Size of alumni board/council



Membership on alumni boards/councils seems to be driven by either key volunteers or engaged alumni. Half of the respondents indicated that board membership was self-perpetuating or self-selecting (figure 5). And one-quarter of alumni boards were elected by alumni association members.

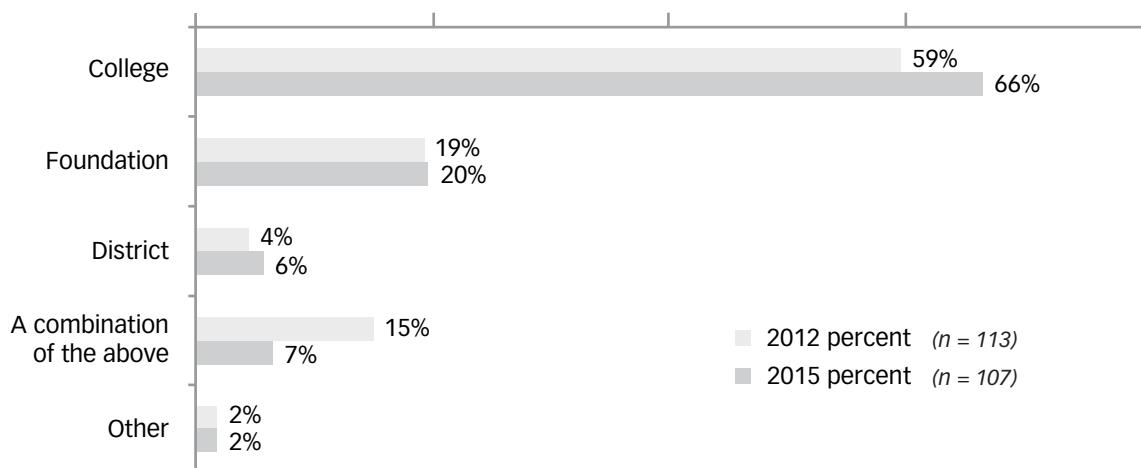
Figure 5
Selection process for alumni board/council



BUDGETING FOR ALUMNI RELATIONS

The majority of responding institutions (66 percent) funded alumni relations staff salaries directly from their own college budgets (figure 6). An additional 20 percent of community colleges had an affiliated foundation that served as the budget source, while six percent reported the community college district as the source (which is consistent with the six percent of the sample from community college districts). This breakdown is mostly equivalent to the results from 2012.

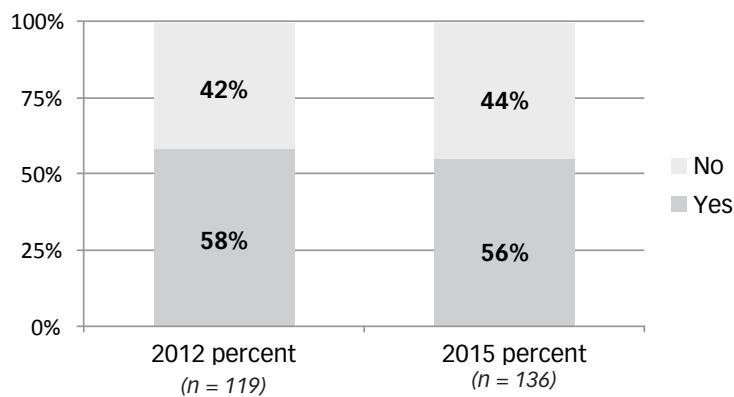
Figure 6
Budget sources for alumni relations staff salaries



There was again an even split among community colleges on the presence of a dedicated operating budget for alumni relations. Slightly more than half (56 percent) of the survey respondents indicated an annual operating budget for alumni relations existed at their institution (figure 7).¹

¹ This finding does not mean that 44 percent of respondents do not spend money on alumni relations; rather, the activities are funded from another budget.

Figure 7
Presence of a dedicated annual operating budget
for alumni relations



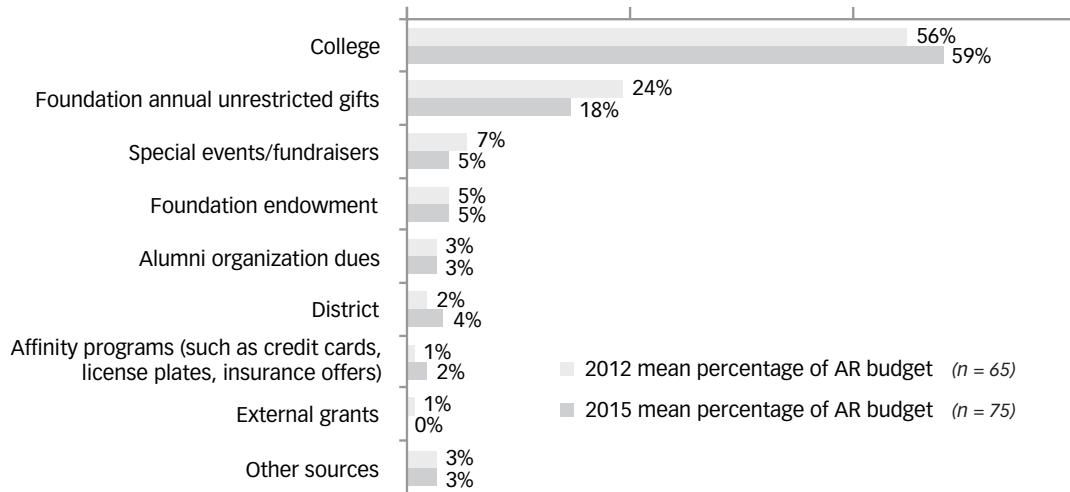
Among the 65 institutions that specified the amount of their alumni relations budgets, the average annual total was \$26,692 (median \$20,000). One-fifth of responding institutions had annual alumni relations budgets on the low end of \$5,000 or less, whereas 39 percent had large annual budgets exceeding \$25,000 (table 2).

Table 2
Amount of annual operating budget for alumni relations

	2012	2015
Mean	\$23,611	\$26,692
Median	\$17,000	\$20,000
Budget range	Percent of respondents	Percent of respondents
\$5,000 or less	20%	20%
\$5,001 to \$10,000	20%	14%
\$10,001 to \$25,000	33%	28%
More than \$25,000	28%	39%
Total	100%	100%
	(n = 61)	(n = 65)

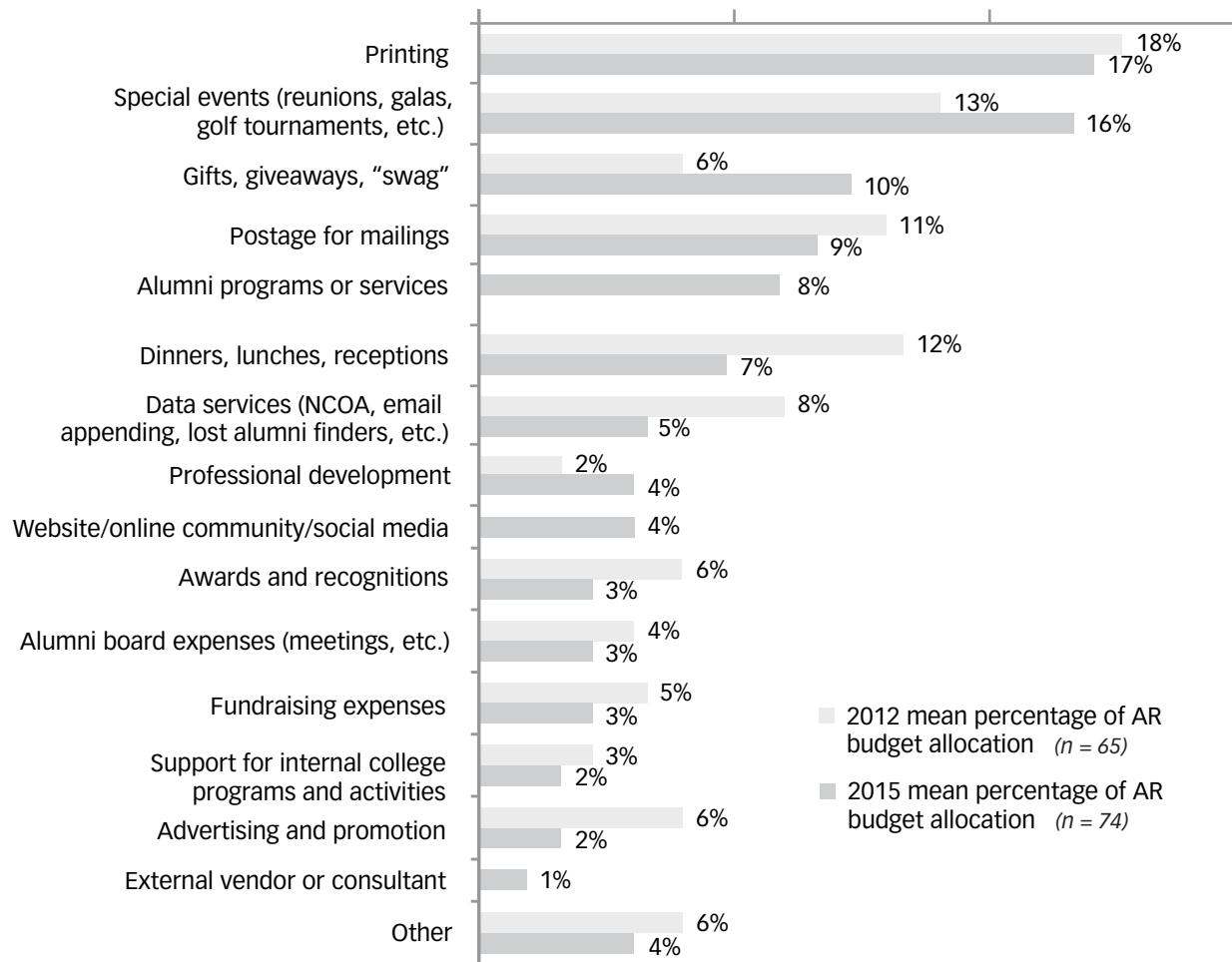
The college itself accounted for a larger share of contributions to the alumni relations budget compared to three years ago. The average contribution by the college to the budget increased from 56 percent to 59 percent (figure 8). The next largest source was foundation annual unrestricted gifts at 18 percent, down from 24 percent in 2012. Each of the other sources accounted for an average of five percent or less of the budget.

Figure 8
Sources of funds for alumni relations budget



Allocations to the alumni budget continued to be spread over a variety of destinations. Printing was still the largest average expense at 17 percent of the annual budget, followed closely by special events at 16 percent (figure 9).

Figure 9
Activities covered by alumni relations budget



Similar proportions of the average alumni relations budget were earmarked for postage (nine percent), alumni programs/services (eight percent) and dinners, lunches and receptions (seven percent). Community colleges set aside the lowest average proportion of their alumni relations budgets to external vendors (one percent), advertising (two percent) and support for internal college programs and activities (two percent).

Charging membership dues for an alumni association or organization does not seem to be a common source of revenue for community colleges. Only 19 percent of responding institutions charged dues for some type of membership, down from 24 percent in 2012 (table 3). Specifically, 10 percent offered both annual and lifetime memberships, seven percent charged only for annual memberships and two percent charged only for lifetime memberships.

Table 3
Charging dues for alumni association membership

	2012 percent	2015 percent
Yes, annual memberships only	8%	7%
Yes, lifetime memberships only	2%	2%
Yes, both annual and lifetime memberships	13%	10%
No, we do not charge membership dues	76%	81%
Total	100%	100%
	(n = 130)	(n = 135)

The survey data suggest that few alumni of community colleges are connecting with their institutions through alumni associations. The average number of paid members of an alumni association or group was 424 people (median 186). These raw numbers translated to an average of 2 percent of the overall alumni population who were paid members of the association (table 4). On the upside, both the raw count and the percentage were rising compared to three years ago.

Table 4

Number of paid members of alumni association

	2012 number	2012 percentage of alumni base	2015 Number	2015 percentage of alumni base
Mean	314.1	0.5%	424.2	2.0%
Median	69.0	0.1%	185.5	0.2%
<i>(n = 51)</i>				<i>(n = 24)</i>

Among the limited number of community colleges that charged dues, most were collecting relatively small amounts. The average alumni dues total in 2015 was \$3,726 (\$2,500 median).

See table 5.

Table 5

Amount collected in alumni dues during latest fiscal year (annual and/or lifetime combined)

2015	
Mean	\$3,726
Median	\$2,500

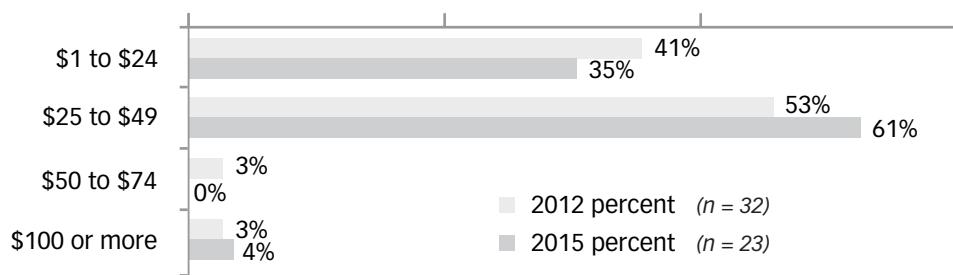
Range	Percent of respondents
\$500 or less	19%
\$501 to \$2,000	29%
\$2,001 to \$5,000	24%
More than \$5,000	29%
Total	100%

(n = 21)

The community colleges that participated in the survey did not make annual membership dues an obstacle to engagement, because the charges were modest across the board. Nearly all of the respondents (96 percent) charged less than \$50 per year for alumni association membership (figure 10). The majority (61 percent) had annual dues between \$25 and \$49.

Figure 10

Amount of annual charge for alumni association membership



Most of the 23 institutions that collected annual dues classified them as either gifts or funds for scholarships. More than one-quarter channeled all annual dues income into gifts or alumni-funded scholarships, and 30 percent classified a lesser proportion (table 6).

Table 6

Portion of annual dues classified as gift or alumni-funded scholarship(s)

Portion	2015 percent
None	43%
1–24%	4%
50–74%	13%
75–99%	13%
100%	26%
Total	100%

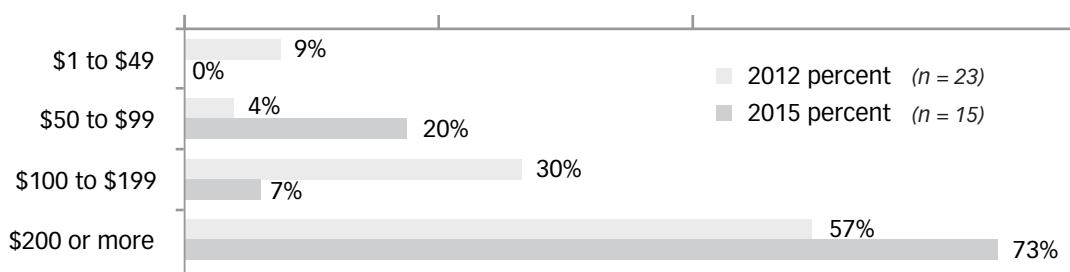
(n = 23)

Note: This question was not asked in 2012.

Only 15 responding institutions charged lifetime dues for alumni association membership, and this cohort was likely to place the dues amount on the high end of the scale. Nearly three-quarters of the institutions with lifetime membership dues charge at least \$200 for the one-time fee (figure 11).

Figure 11

Amount of lifetime charge for alumni association membership



Classification of lifetime dues as gifts or scholarships followed a pattern similar to annual dues. One-third of the institutions that collected lifetime dues treated all of them as gifts or funds for scholarships (table 7). Forty percent did not channel any income from lifetime dues into those areas.

Table 7

Portion of lifetime dues classified as gift or alumni-funded scholarship(s)

Portion	2015 percent
None	40%
1–24%	13%
50–74%	7%
75–99%	7%
100%	33%
Total	100%

(n = 15)

Note: This question was not asked in 2012.

Table 8 shows that responding institutions have maintained a variety of policies toward alumni association dues in the past three years. These results suggest that some community colleges have felt compelled to adjust their approach recently. However, a sizable majority (73 percent) of respondents have not charged any dues either in 2012 or 2015.

Table 8

Comparison of 2012 and 2015 policies toward alumni association membership dues

Policy	Percent
We only charge annual memberships now, but we did not charge any dues three years ago	2%
We charge only annual memberships now, but we charged both annual and lifetime memberships three years ago	1%
We only charge annual memberships, now and three years ago	5%
We only charge lifetime memberships now, but we charged both annual and lifetime memberships three years ago	2%
We charge only lifetime memberships, now and three years ago	1%
We charge both annual and lifetime membership dues now, but we did not charge membership dues three years ago	2%
We charge both annual and lifetime memberships now, but we only charged lifetime memberships three years ago	1%
We charge both annual and lifetime memberships now, but we only charged annual memberships three years ago	1%
We charge both annual and lifetime memberships, now and three years ago	7%
We do not charge dues now, but we did charge both annual and lifetime memberships three years ago	4%
We do not charge dues now, but we did charge lifetime memberships three years ago	1%
We do not charge dues now, but we did charge annual membership dues three years ago	2%
We do not charge membership dues, now or three years ago	73%
Total	100%

(n = 130)

Alumni office activity around scholarships has been modest at community colleges. Most responding institutions did not fund any scholarships through their alumni association or office in 2015, so the average number was 2.8 scholarships for the fiscal year (table 9). The average total dollar amount allocated to all scholarships was \$6,564, which averaged to \$863 per scholarship recipient.

Table 9

Scholarships funded or awarded specifically by the alumni association/office

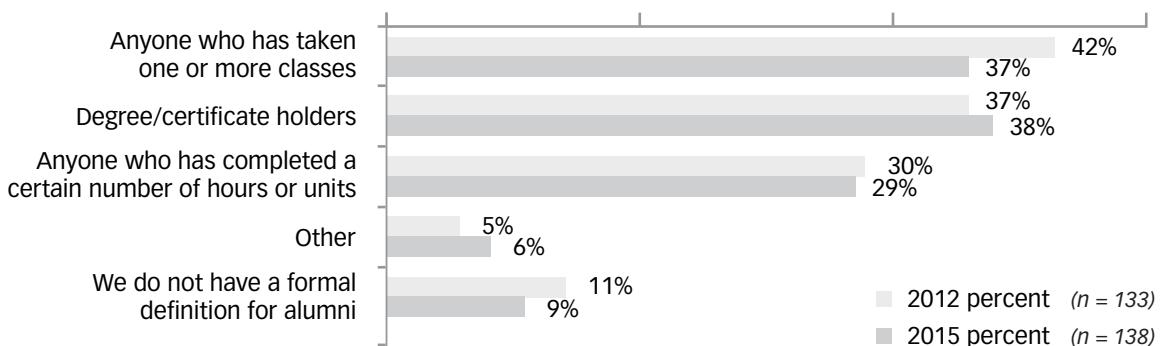
	2015 number of scholarships	2015 total \$ amount	2015 \$ amount per beneficiary
Mean	2.8	\$6,564	\$863
Median	0.0	\$2,850	\$800
	(n = 117)	(n = 50)	(n = 49)

Note: This question was not asked in 2012.

ALUMNI DATA COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT

Community colleges remain divided in their approaches to defining alumni of their institutions. The strict definition of alumni as solely degree or certificate holders was used by 38 percent of survey participants, comparable to the 37 percent who considered anyone who had taken one or more classes as alumni (figure 12). An additional 29 percent of responding institutions defined alumni as anyone who had completed a certain number of hours or units. Only nine percent of community colleges did not maintain a formal definition of alumni.

Figure 12
College/district definition of alumni



The 2015 survey introduced a question designed to add some context to tracking alumni counts. Instead of only providing the number of alumni based on the institution's definition, respondents also provided the alumni count based on the CASE definition (the total number of students who ever attended the institution, not including noncredit courses). There were significant differences between the two figures for many institutions, with the counts based on the CASE definition tending to skew higher (table 10). The average number of alumni based on the institution's definition was 159,985 in 2015 (48,500 median), compared to an average of 210,208 based on the CASE definition (90,000 median).

Table 10
Approximate number of alumni for college/district

	2012 based on institution's definition	2015 based on institution's definition	2015 based on CASE definition
Mean	139,462	159,985	210,208
Median	42,000	48,500	90,000
Range	Percent of respondents	Percent of respondents	Percent of respondents
Less than 25,000	29%	27%	23%
25,000 to 49,999	26%	23%	12%
50,000 to 100,000	18%	22%	20%
More than 100,000	28%	28%	44%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	(n = 98)	(n = 128)	(n = 99)

Note: In 2012 and 2015, respondents were asked to provide alumni counts based on their institutional definition of alumni.

A parallel question in 2015 asked for alumni counts based on the CASE definition of alumni (the total number of students who ever attended the institution, not including noncredit courses).

Tracking contact information for alumni has been challenging for community colleges over the years, but the survey results suggest that some progress has been made. The average percentage of the alumni base with valid mailing addresses increased slightly from 47.5 percent in 2012 to 48.6 percent in 2015 (table 11). The average raw count of alumni with valid mailing addresses was 32,542 in 2015 (18,000 median).

Table 11
Approximate number of alumni with valid mailing addresses

	2012 number	2012 percent of alumni base		2015 number	2015 percent of alumni base
Mean	21,938	47.5%		32,542	48.6%
Median	13,125	50.0%		18,000	50.0%
	(n = 92)			(n = 127)	(n = 116)

Maintaining viable email addresses for alumni has been more difficult than postal mailing addresses, but some encouraging signs emerged in the data. There was an increase in the average percentage of the alumni base with valid email addresses, from 12 percent in 2012 to 19.2 percent in 2015 (table 12). In raw numbers, the average was 10,726 in 2015 (5,350 median).

Table 12

Approximate number of alumni with valid email addresses

	2012 number	2012 percent of alumni base		2015 number	2015 percent of alumni base
Mean	7,870	12.0%		10,726	19.2%
Median	3,000	8.0%		5,350	13.1%
	(n = 96)			(n = 134)	(n = 123)

Another important aspect of tracking alumni involves pinpointing their geographic location. According to the survey respondents, the majority of their alumni continue to reside in the college's or district's service area (table 13). The average estimate was 70.6 percent of alumni still residing in the area. Only 17 percent of responding institutions had less than half of their alumni living within the service area, whereas 56 percent estimated that at least three-quarters of alumni remained residents.

Table 13

Approximate number of former students living within the college's or district's service area

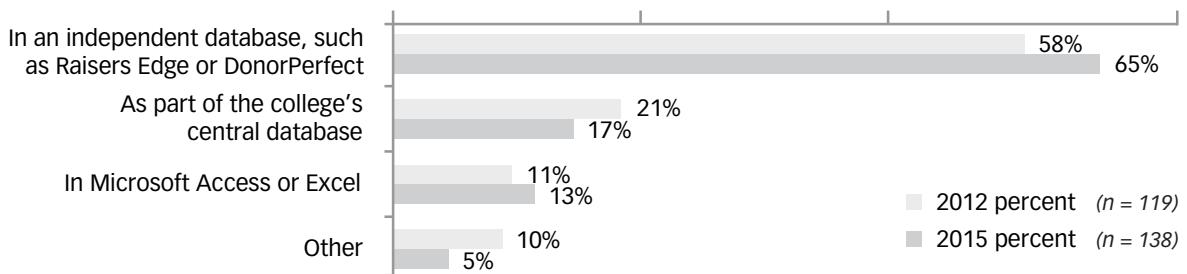
	2015
Mean	70.6%
Median	75.0%
Range	Percent of respondents
50% or less	17%
51% to 74%	27%
75% to 80%	32%
More than 80%	24%
Total	100%

(n = 75)

Note: This question was not asked in 2012.

The survey results continued to reveal that alumni record-keeping in most community colleges is decentralized. Only 17 percent of responding institutions integrate their alumni data with the college's central database (figure 13). In contrast, independent, vendor-developed databases were the most popular method for alumni data maintenance (65 percent). An additional 13 percent of respondents reported using Microsoft products (Access or Excel) for their alumni records.

Figure 13
Method of tracking alumni data



Maintenance of alumni records takes on many forms at community colleges, and the degrees of activity for various tasks have remained consistent in recent years. The most frequently performed record maintenance continued to be receipt of electronic student records from the college or registrar, which was done annually by 57 percent of the respondents (quarterly for 14 percent). See table 14. The second-most frequent activity was running NCOA (national change of address) on alumni records; 38 percent ran NCOA yearly and 18 percent quarterly. Other alumni records activities required engagement with a third-party vendor and were performed far less frequently, usually every few years, if at all.

Table 14.1

Activities for maintenance of alumni records—2012 (n = 116)

	Quarterly	Annually	Every 2–3 years	Every 4–5 years	Never	Never, but we plan to do this in the next year
Receive electronic student records from the college/registrar for alumni purposes	16%	58%	2%	3%	16%	7%
Run NCOA (national change of address) on alumni records	14%	32%	7%	8%	23%	16%
Engage a vendor to update addresses or “find” lost alumni	1%	9%	16%	28%	32%	15%
Engage a vendor to conduct a wealth screening of alumni	1%	5%	12%	16%	45%	22%
Engage a vendor to append email addresses to alumni records		6%	11%	22%	46%	15%
Engage a vendor to append phone numbers to alumni records		6%	10%	21%	50%	13%

Table 14.2

Activities for maintenance of alumni records—2015 (n = 136)

	Quarterly	Annually	Every 2–3 years	Every 4–5 years	Never	Never, but we plan to do this in the next year
Receive electronic student records from the college/registrar for alumni purposes	14%	57%	5%	1%	12%	10%
Run NCOA (national change of address) on alumni records	18%	38%	9%	9%	14%	12%
Engage a vendor to update addresses or “find” lost alumni	1%	12%	21%	21%	26%	19%
Engage a vendor to conduct a wealth screening of alumni	3%	5%	12%	22%	42%	16%
Engage a vendor to append email addresses to alumni records	1%	9%	18%	14%	39%	18%
Engage a vendor to append phone numbers to alumni records	1%	9%	15%	12%	47%	15%

ALUMNI COMMUNICATIONS AND STRATEGY

Community colleges take advantage of many communication methods to stay connected with alumni. The latest survey results suggest that their usage of these methods has not changed much in the past three years, with one exception: social media. Reliance on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter were each on the rise (table 15). For example, daily posting to Facebook increased from 13 percent of respondents in 2012 to 20 percent in 2015 (weekly postings were up four percentage points). Responding institutions also reported a similar increase in weekly postings to LinkedIn and Twitter (nine percentage points each). However, Pinterest and Google+ still have not gained any traction—only four percent and one percent of institutions used these technologies, respectively.

Table 15.1

Frequency of alumni office communication with alumni through various methods—2012 (n = 102)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually	Never
Bulk email/email newsletter		3%	23%	35%	23%	17%
Posting to college website	5%	14%	29%	22%	11%	19%
Posting to Facebook	13%	38%	21%	8%	1%	19%
Direct mail			2%	23%	50%	25%
Print newsletter/magazine			2%	36%	28%	35%
Individual emails	6%	13%	12%	18%	11%	40%
Individual phone calls	5%	11%	4%	11%	15%	55%
Posting to LinkedIn	5%	10%	16%	10%	2%	58%
Posting to Twitter	6%	11%	6%	4%		74%
Phone bank/call center			1%	2%	22%	75%
Via a college-administered online community	4%	4%	6%	3%	3%	80%
Posting to Pinterest	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	94%
Posting to Google+	1%			1%	1%	97%
Sending text messages				1%	1%	98%
Personal visits	na	na	na	na	na	na
Other		4%		4%		92%

Note: "na" indicates the question was not asked in 2012.

Table 15.2

Frequency of alumni office communication with alumni through various methods—2015 (n = 125)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually	Never
Bulk email/email newsletter			25%	41%	15%	18%
Posting to college website	5%	13%	25%	27%	8%	22%
Posting to Facebook	20%	42%	18%	7%	2%	12%
Direct mail		1%	2%	19%	53%	26%
Print newsletter/magazine	1%		1%	25%	28%	45%
Individual emails	8%	15%	12%	15%	10%	40%
Individual phone calls	6%	11%	16%	10%	7%	50%
Posting to LinkedIn	5%	19%	17%	14%	5%	41%
Posting to Twitter	10%	20%	4%	6%	1%	60%
Phone bank/call center	1%			2%	15%	82%
Via a college-administered online community	2%	5%	7%	2%	5%	79%
Posting to Pinterest			2%	1%	2%	96%
Posting to Google+				1%		99%
Sending text messages	1%	2%	1%		2%	95%
Personal visits	2%	7%	20%	12%	9%	51%
Other			5%	2%	2%	90%

Established methods still have a foothold in community college communication tactics. Bulk newsletter emailing, posting to the community college website and direct mailings were each done by roughly three-quarters of the respondents. Personal visits by college staff also were used on at least a monthly basis by nearly 30 percent of respondents.

Attempts to engage alumni often take the form of face-to-face events and social activities rather than services and formal programs administered through the college. In particular, invitations to college events and student activities had the highest reported usage (table 16). Alumni board meetings were also leveraged on a regular basis by many institutions, with 15 percent citing monthly use and 32 percent citing quarterly use. Some of the least-utilized engagement methods included hosting an alumni weekend, requests to do legislative advocacy and participation in a speakers bureau.

Table 16.1

Frequency of attempts at engagement with alumni through various methods—2012 (n = 101)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually	Never
Invitations to college events	2%	10%	44%	28%	16%	
Alumni board meetings		17%	35%	9%	39%	
Free alumni social gatherings		4%	16%	40%	41%	
College volunteer opportunities	1%	1%	23%	34%	41%	
Invitations to student activities	2%	7%	26%	20%	46%	
Meetings or events of alumni based on affinity/program		2%	12%	33%	54%	
College career services		2%	15%	25%	58%	
Paid alumni social gatherings		2%	9%	30%	59%	
Campus advisory committee service		1%	18%	22%	59%	
Professional networking events		2%	10%	26%	63%	
Reunions			3%	30%	67%	
Helping with student recruitment			5%	20%	75%	
Community service projects		1%	8%	15%	77%	
Participation in a speakers bureau		1%	4%	17%	78%	
Alumni recognition program (distinguished alumni, etc.)	na	na	na	na	na	na
Alumni weekend	na	na	na	na	na	na
Requests to do legislative advocacy				5%	8%	87%
Homecoming	na	na	na	na	na	na
Personal visits	na	na	na	na	na	na
Other events or activities	2%	2%	2%	5%	88%	

Note: "na" indicates the question was not asked in 2012.

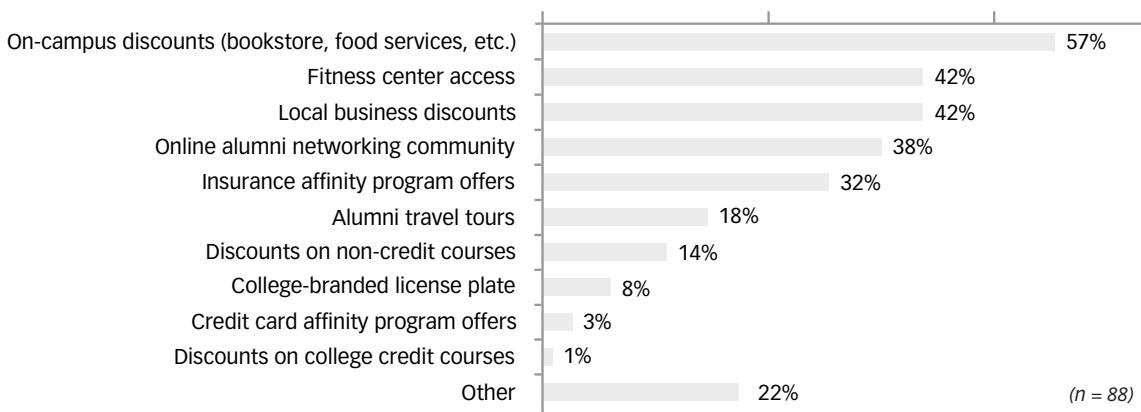
Table 16.2

Frequency of attempts at engagement with alumni through various methods—2015 (n = 128)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually	Never
Invitations to college events	1%	18%	40%	21%	21%	
Alumni board meetings		15%	32%	3%	50%	
Free alumni social gatherings		3%	19%	29%	49%	
College volunteer opportunities		9%	21%	31%	39%	
Invitations to student activities	1%	15%	24%	17%	43%	
Meetings or events of alumni based on affinity/program		5%	13%	32%	51%	
College career services	1%		2%	12%	21%	64%
Paid alumni social gatherings		2%	10%	18%	71%	
Campus advisory committee service		5%	15%	15%	66%	
Professional networking events		2%	12%	13%	73%	
Reunions			4%	36%	60%	
Helping with student recruitment		2%	8%	16%	75%	
Community service projects		3%	7%	15%	75%	
Participation in a speakers bureau			9%	14%	78%	
Alumni recognition program (distinguished alumni, etc.)		1%	2%	64%	33%	
Alumni weekend			1%	9%	90%	
Requests to do legislative advocacy		2%		13%	85%	
Homecoming				22%	78%	
Personal visits	2%	9%	22%	10%	12%	44%
Other events or activities		2%	2%	3%	14%	80%

Offering benefits and services to alumni is another popular component of an alumni engagement strategy. More than half of the responding institutions provided alumni with discounts to on-campus services such as the bookstore, cafeterias, etc. (figure 14). Fitness center access and local business discounts each were made available at 42 percent of community colleges. Some of the underutilized benefits included discounts on college credit courses, credit card affinity program offers and college-branded license plates.

Figure 14
Benefits/services offered through alumni office



Note: Responses sum to more than 100% because multiple responses were allowed.
This question was not asked in 2012.

"Other" responses included:

- Academic Support Center
- Access to College Library and Career Services; college pool; discounts on shows; class monitoring and attending guest speakers; college career and employment services
- Alumni members get free entry to athletic events, student performances, Appleton Museum and library services
- Career Center services
- Career Services

- Currently building program, plan to include on campus discounts, insurance affinity program offers, college branded gear, discounts on noncredit courses, and local business discounts
- Discounted energy services
- Free audit
- Free magazine
- Hotel/car rental discounts
- Library access
- Library privileges
- Library, career service

- Membership provided free library and sporting event entry
- Nonlocal business discounts
- Online business discounts
- Other affinity programs with banks, car dealership
- Use of campus computer labs and library materials

ALUMNI RELATIONS AND FUNDRAISING

The alumni relations office often has the opportunity to augment development activities at community colleges. The survey data suggest that most institutions have a mixed approach to incorporating alumni relations specialists into their fundraising. Direct mail remains the most-used solicitation tactic, with half of the responding institutions sending mail solicitations on an annual basis (table 17). Email has also become an important fundraising tool for roughly half of the community colleges that participated. And the alumni magazine/newsletter is likely to contain some type of philanthropic request for half of the responding institutions.

Table 17.1

Frequency of alumni office solicitation of alumni for financial contributions through various methods

	2012					
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually	Never
Direct mail			1%	12%	65%	21%
Gala fundraiser					56%	44%
Email	1%		6%	24%	21%	48%
Alumni magazine or newsletter			5%	21%	25%	49%
Golf tournament				1%	48%	51%
Facebook	2%		3%	10%	10%	75%
Phone bank			1%	1%	21%	77%
Twitter				2%	1%	97%
Google+						100%
In person	na	na	na	na	na	na
Other			8%	5%	10%	78%

(n = 104)

Table 17.2

Frequency of alumni office solicitation of alumni for financial contributions through various methods

	2015					
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Annually	Never
Direct mail	1%			19%	50%	30%
Gala fundraiser				1%	37%	62%
Email			8%	15%	30%	47%
Alumni magazine or newsletter			2%	21%	28%	50%
Golf tournament					42%	58%
Facebook			2%	11%	21%	66%
Phone bank	1%			1%	14%	84%
Twitter				5%	7%	88%
Google+					1%	99%
In person		6%	12%	7%	17%	58%
Other			2%		9%	90%

(n = 124)

Community colleges continue to prefer these established methods for soliciting alumni over emerging technologies—except for Facebook. Newer methods of contact did not resonate with responding institutions: only one percent of the community colleges used Google+ for solicitations and 12 percent used Twitter, although this usage is trending upward compared to 2012. Facebook usage for solicitations was also on the rise, with 21 percent of institutions using it annually and 11 percent using it quarterly.

There is some evidence that all of the fundraising activities might be moving the needle for many community colleges. The percentage of the alumni base that donated in the past year increased from 0.5 percent in 2012 to 0.9 percent in 2015, a modest gain (table 18). The average alumni donor count was 244 in responding institutions (median 130), which also represented an increase.

Table 18

Number of financial gifts made by alumni to the college/foundation in most recent fiscal year

	2012 number	2012 percent of alumni base		2015 Number	2015 percent of alumni base
Mean	214	0.5%		244	0.9%
Median	100	0.2%		130	0.3%
	(n = 86)			(n = 114)	(n = 107)

Dollar amounts for financial support from alumni were trending upward as well. In 2015, the average private giving figure from alumni was \$117,659 per institution (median \$37,173). See table 19.

Table 19

Dollar amount of private giving from alumni in most recent fiscal year

	2012 amount	2015 amount
Mean	\$50,846	\$117,659
Median	\$19,474	\$37,173
	(n = 90)	(n = 111)

The average total dollar amount of private giving from all sources was \$1,772,343 for 2015 (median \$990,370). See table 20. When isolating the amount from alumni, the average contribution to total giving from alumni sources was 9.1 percent, up from 6.5 percent three years ago.

Table 20

Dollar amount of private giving from all sources in most recent fiscal year

	2012 amount from all sources	2012 percent of total giving from alumni sources		2015 amount from all sources	2015 percent of total giving from alumni sources
Mean	\$1,037,371	6.5%		\$1,772,343	9.1%
Median	\$581,658	2.8%		\$990,370	4.1%
	(n = 85)			(n = 106)	(n = 99)

Responses to a question about key trends in community college alumni relations also reflected a sense of optimism. More than half of the responding institutions reported some kind of gain in alumni giving, and only 10 percent experienced a decline (table 21). Respondents had similar assessments of the volume of alumni donors and alumni engagement patterns such as volunteering, event attendance, etc.

Table 21
Change in alumni trends in past three years

	Increased considerably	Increased slightly	Stayed the same	Decreased slightly	Decreased considerably	Total
Amount of money spent on alumni relations programs (excluding salaries)	10%	25%	48%	11%	6%	100%
Total staffing for alumni relations	12%	20%	59%	2%	7%	100%
Staff time spent on alumni relations	22%	25%	38%	9%	5%	100%
Number of alumni contributing to the college/district	9%	41%	42%	4%	5%	100%
Total giving from alumni	9%	43%	38%	5%	5%	100%
Overall engagement by alumni (includes volunteering, event attendance, donating, etc.)	13%	37%	42%	2%	5%	100%
College staff participation in CASE events and activities (webinars, district or national conferences, networking calls, etc.)	16%	28%	45%	2%	8%	100%

Note: This question was not asked in 2012.

(n = 129)

Some trends showed fewer signs of encouragement, however. Nearly half of community colleges kept their alumni relations budgets at the same level in recent years, and 17 percent actually reduced their budgets. Staffing levels were mostly static, with 59 percent of institutions holding the employee count steady, but 32 percent did report increases. The upside of staffing trends was that many employees did dedicate more of their time to alumni relations (47 percent reported increases in staff time on alumni relations).

INSTITUTIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey respondents represented multiple types of community colleges. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) were single colleges with multiple campuses (table 22). More than one-quarter (27 percent) identified themselves as a single institution with only one campus. Only six percent of the responding institutions classified themselves as districts with multiple colleges.

Table 22
Type of institution

Institution type	2012 percent	2015 percent
Single college with one campus	22%	27%
Single college with multiple campuses	68%	65%
District with multiple colleges	8%	6%
Other	2%	1%
Total	100%	100%
	(n = 133)	(n = 139)

Although community colleges of varying enrollment sizes participated in the survey, the majority (66 percent) had student populations of less than 10,000 FTEs (full-time equivalents). See table 23. Roughly one-tenth had enrollments of less than 2,000 FTEs, and 27 percent maintained a student population between 2,000 and 4,999 FTEs. The largest enrollment classification of 20,000 or more FTEs accounted for 12 percent of the responding institutions.

Table 23
Size of student population (or full district)

Size of student population	2012 percent	2015 percent
Fewer than 500 FTEs	1%	0%
500–1,999 FTEs	10%	9%
2,000–4,999 FTEs	29%	27%
5,000–9,999 FTEs	25%	30%
10,000–19,999 FTEs	22%	22%
20,000 or more FTEs	14%	12%
Total	100%	100%
	(n = 132)	(n = 137)

APPENDIX: SURVEY QUESTIONS

COMMUNITY COLLEGE ALUMNI PROGRAMS SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to collect information that will allow community college staff to benchmark their alumni programs with their peers on a national level. Your responses will also guide future CASE programming for community colleges.

The survey will take roughly 20 minutes to complete, and should be answered by the person who has the primary responsibility for alumni relations at a college or district. Please complete only one survey per institution.

All information regarding the person completing the survey will remain confidential. The final analysis, which we will share with all participants, will only report on general trends.

DEMOGRAPHICS (Optional)

Note that respondents must provide contact information to receive survey results. Demographic and contact information from this section will remain confidential.

Name of College/District

College Address #1

College Address #2

City

State

Zip

Phone

Your Email Address

GENERAL

1. What kind of institution does your office represent?
 - Single college with one campus
 - Single college with multiple campuses
 - District with multiple colleges
 - Other (please specify)

2. What is the size of your student population (or full district per question above)?
Full-time Equivalents (FTEs):
 - Fewer than 500
 - 500–1,999
 - 2,000–4,999
 - 5,000–9,999
 - 10,000–19,999
 - 20,000 or more

3. How does your college/district define your alumni? (select all that apply)
 - Degree/certificate holders
 - Anyone who has completed a certain number of hours or units
 - Anyone who has taken one or more classes
 - Other (please specify)
 - We do not have a formal definition for alumni

ALUMNI DATA

4. Based on your college/district's definition of alumni, approximately how many alumni does your college/district have?

The CASE Reporting Standards and Management Guidelines defines alumni as anyone who has received credit toward a degree or credential. Based on the CASE definition, approximately how many alumni do you have? (This would be the total number of students who ever attended your institution, not including noncredit courses.)

5. For approximately how many of your alumni do you have valid mailing addresses? (Use a number, not a percentage.)
6. For approximately how many of your alumni do you have valid email addresses? (Use a number, not a percentage.)
7. Approximately what percentage of your institution's former students live within the college's or district's service area?
 - Less than 25%
 - 25%–49%
 - 50%–74%
 - 75% or more
 - Don't know
8. In your most recently concluded fiscal year, how many alumni made financial gifts to the college/foundation? (Use a number, not a percentage.)
9. In your most recently concluded fiscal year, what was the total dollar amount of private giving from alumni?
10. In your most recently concluded fiscal year, what was the total dollar amount of private giving from all sources? This would be the same total that was reported to the Voluntary Support of Education (VSE) survey. (Do not include pledges, government funds or government grants.)

11. How is your alumni data maintained? (select one)

- As part of the college's central database
- In an independent database, such as Raisers Edge
- In Microsoft Access or Excel
- Other (please specify)

12. Please indicate how often you do the following:

(Scale: Quarterly, Annually, Every 2–3 years; Every 4–5 years; Never; Never, but we plan to do this in the next year)

- Receive electronic student records from the college/registrar for alumni purposes
- Run NCOA (national change of address) on alumni records
- Engage a vendor to update addresses or "find" lost alumni
- Engage a vendor to append phone numbers to alumni records
- Engage a vendor to append email addresses to alumni records
- Engage a vendor to conduct a wealth screening of alumni

STAFFING & BUDGET

13. To whom does the chief alumni relations staff member report?

- President/Chancellor
- Vice President for Advancement/Development
- Foundation Director
- Other (please specify)

14. If the chief alumni relations staff member has other primary responsibilities, please indicate approximately what percentage of time is spent on other activities that are not directly alumni related (numbers should total 100):

____ % Alumni relations (put 100% if this person has no other responsibilities)

____ % Annual Fund

____ % Major Gifts

____ % Marketing & advertising the college, foundation or district
(not alumni-related)

____ % Communications & public relations for the college, district or foundation
(not alumni-related)

____ % Foundation Director/Management

____ % Event Planning

____ % Website management

____ % Social media

____ % Other (please specify)

15. What is the title of the chief alumni relations staff member?

16. How long has the chief alumni relations staff member been in her/his current role?

- Less than one year
- 1–2 years
- 3–5 years
- 5–7 years
- More than 7 years

17. Please indicate the total number of full-time and part-time employees at your office that are dedicated to alumni relations. (If you are responding on behalf of a district or multiple offices, include the total for all offices.)

____ Number of part-time alumni relations staff

____ Number of full-time alumni relations staff

18. Where does the budget for alumni relations staff salaries come from? (check only one)

- District
- College
- Foundation
- Alumni association
- A combination of the above
- Other (please specify)

19. Is there a dedicated annual operating budget for alumni relations?

- Yes
- No

19B. How much is the annual operating budget for alumni relations? (Not including salaries and benefits)

19C. Indicate approximately what percentage of the amount listed in 19B comes from the following sources (total should equal 100%):

____ % District

____ % College

____ % Foundation endowment

____ % Foundation annual unrestricted gifts

- % Alumni organization dues
- % Affinity programs (such as credit cards, license plates, insurance offers)
- % External grants
- % Special events/fundraisers
- % Other sources (please specify)

19D. Indicate approximately what percentage of your operating budget from 18B is spent on the following alumni relations activities (totals should equal 100%):

- % Postage for mailings
- % Printing
- % Dinners, lunches, receptions
- % Special events (galas, golf tournaments, etc.)
- % Gifts, giveaways, "swag"
- % Alumni board expenses (meetings, etc.)
- % Data services (NCOA, email appending, lost alumni finders, etc.)
- % Awards and recognitions
- % Reunions
- % Advertising and promotion
- % Support for internal college programs and activities
- % Fundraising expenses
- % Professional development
- % Other (please specify)

ALUMNI ORGANIZATIONS & BOARDS

20. Does your alumni association have a board/council?

- Yes
- No

20A. If yes, how large is the board/council?

- Fewer than 6
- 6–10
- 11–15
- 16–20
- More than 20

20B. How is the board/council selected?

- Elected by association members
- Appointed by college or district staff
- Appointed by Foundation board
- Self-perpetuating/self-selecting
- Other (Please describe)

21. Does your institution/alumni association currently charge membership dues?

- Yes, annual memberships only
- Yes, lifetime memberships only
- Yes, both annual and lifetime memberships
- No, we do not charge membership dues at this time

22. If you charge membership dues, approximately how many paid members do you currently have? (Use a number, not a percentage.)

23. For your most recent fiscal year, how much did you collect in alumni dues (annual and/or lifetime combined)?

24. How much does your association charge annually for membership?

\$1–\$24

\$25–\$49

\$50–\$74

\$75–\$99

\$100 or more

25. What portion, if any, of those annual dues are considered a gift to the college and/or for an alumni-funded scholarship(s)?

None

1–24%

25–49%

50–74%

75–99%

100%

26. How much does your association charge for a one-time lifetime membership (if any)?

\$1–\$49

\$50–\$99

\$100–\$199

\$200 or more

27. What portion, if any, of those annual dues are considered a gift to the college and/or for an alumni-funded scholarship(s)?

- None
- 1–24%
- 25–49%
- 50–74%
- 75–99%
- 100%

28. Did your institution/alumni association charge membership dues three years ago?

- Yes, annual memberships only
- Yes, lifetime memberships only
- Yes, both annual and lifetime memberships
- No, we did not charge membership dues then

29. For the most recent fiscal year, how many scholarships specifically were funded or awarded by the alumni association/office? (Do not include other foundation scholarships unless they are designated as from the alumni association.)

30. For the most recent fiscal year, what was the total dollar amount of scholarships funded or awarded specifically by the alumni association/office? (Do not include other foundation scholarships unless they are designated as from the alumni association.)

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

31. Please indicate how often you or your alumni office communicates with alumni via the following methods:

Scale: Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Quarterly; Annually; Never

- Bulk email/email newsletter
- Individual emails
- Posting to Facebook
- Posting to Twitter
- Posting to LinkedIn
- Posting to Google+
- Posting to Pinterest
- Posting to college website
- Sending text messages
- Via a college-administered online community
- Print newsletter/magazine
- Direct mail
- Phone bank/call center
- Individual phone calls
- Personal visits
- Other (please specify)

32. Please indicate how often you or your alumni office solicits alumni for financial contributions using the following methods:

Scale: Daily; Weekly; Monthly; Quarterly; Annually; Never

- Email
- Direct mail
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Google+
- Phone bank
- Golf tournament
- Gala fundraiser
- Alumni magazine or newsletter
- In person
- Other (please specify)

33. Please indicate how often you or your school engages alumni through the following means:

Scale: Weekly; Monthly; Quarterly; Annually; Never

- Alumni board meetings
- Reunions
- Meetings or events of alumni based on affinity/program
- Free alumni social gatherings
- Paid alumni social gatherings
- Alumni travel tours
- Professional networking events
- Requests to do legislative advocacy
- Invitations to college events
- Invitations to student activities
- Campus advisory committee service
- College volunteer opportunities
- Community service projects
- Helping with student recruitment
- Participation in a speakers bureau
- College career services
- Insurance affinity program offers
- Credit card affinity program offers
- Other events or activities (describe)

34. What benefits/services are offered through your alumni association/office?

- Alumni travel tours
- On-campus discounts (bookstore, food services, etc.)
- Fitness center access
- Insurance affinity program offers
- Credit card affinity program offers
- College-branded license plate
- Local business discounts
- Discounts on college credit courses
- Discounts on noncredit courses
- Online alumni networking community
- Others (please specify)

35. Please briefly describe what you think are your most effective alumni engagement activities:

36. In the last three years, how have the following changed, if at all:

Scale: Increased considerably; Increased slightly; Stayed the same; Decreased slightly; Decreased considerably

- Amount of money spent on alumni relations programs (excluding salaries)
- Total staffing for alumni relations
- Staff time spent on alumni relations
- Number of alumni contributing to the college/district
- Total giving from alumni
- Overall engagement by alumni (includes volunteering, event attendance, donating, etc.)
- College staff participation in CASE events and activities (webinars, district or national conferences, networking calls, etc.)

ABOUT CASE

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) is the professional organization for advancement professionals at all levels who work in alumni relations, communications and marketing, development and advancement services.

CASE's membership includes more than 3,672 colleges, universities and independent and secondary schools in more than 80 countries. This makes CASE one of the largest nonprofit education associations in the world in terms of institutional membership. CASE also serves more than 81,000 advancement professionals on staffs of member institutions and has more than 15,000 individual "premier-level members" and more than 168 Educational Partner corporate members.

CASE has offices in Washington, D.C., London, Singapore and Mexico City. The association produces high-quality and timely content, publications, conferences, institutes and workshops that assist advancement professionals perform more effectively and serve their institutions.

For information, visit www.case.org or call +1-202-328-2273.